OVER THE TOP

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★ No. 151 **THEY SHALL NOT PASS**
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OVER THE TOP

IT WAS AS QUIET AS THE GRAVE AND, INDEED, THERE WERE MANY AMONG THE ADVANCING TROOPS WHO HAD A GRIM PREMONITION THEY WERE CROSSING THEIR OWN BURIAL-GROUND.

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Chapter 1. Up and At 'Em

EARLIER, BRITISH ARTILLERY HAD BOMBARDED A RIDGE AHEAD WITHOUT REPLY. NOW THE GUNS WERE MUTE.

MARK MY WORDS, MAJOR—JERRY'S WAITING FOR US! HE WON'T GIVE UP WITHOUT A SCRAP THIS TIME—HE'S IN TOO GOOD A DEFENSIVE POSITION.

THEN IT CAME—A SUDDEN GUST OF HOT METAL. TRACER RIPPED FROM THE RIDGE IN LETHAL CHAINS OF LIGHT.

MAJOR! CAPTAIN DUNN'S HIT!

Over The Top

HOW BAD IS IT, SERGEANT-MAJOR ?
COULDN'T BE WORSE, SIR — HE'S DEAD !

THE TRACER WAS SITING INTO THE COMPANY'S 3-LINE ADVANCE AND, TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, 88 M.M. GUNS BEGAN TO DELUGE THE PLAIN WITH HIGH EXPLOSIVE.

THE FORWARD ELEMENTS OF THE COMPANY WAVERED. OFF TO BIG BILL'S LEFT, A SOLDIER DIVED TO COVER.
HEY, CURTIS! WHAT THE HECK D'YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?

IT WAS THE MAJOR'S BATMAN, A RECENT "POSTING". HIS ACTION COULD HAVE BROUGHT THE WHOLE ADVANCE TO A HALT IF OTHER MEN HAD FOLLOWED HIS EXAMPLE.
UP, YOU LITTLE WEASEL! UP!

HE HAULED THE RIFLEMAN TO HIS FEET, AND SENT HIM SCUTTLING OFF AFTER THE OTHERS.
ON YOUR WAY, HALF-PINT! I WANT NO SKIVERS IN MY COMPANY!

THE ADVANCE CONTINUED, AND QUICKENED IN PACE AS BIG BILL BOUNDED FORWARD INTO THE LEAD.
STRAIGHT FOR THE HIGH GROUND, LADS! THE FASTER WE MOVE, THE QUICKER WE'LL BE CLEAR OF THE STRAFING!

IN THREE WAVES, THE MEN OF "B" COMPANY SWEPT THROUGH THE BLAZE OF THE BARRAGE, BUT MANY NEVER MADE IT...

CURTIS WAS AMONG THOSE WHO SURVIVED THE STORM OF SHELLFIRE AND DOUBLED IN A RAGGED LINE TO THE FOOT OF A SLOPE.

I AIN'T CUT OUT FOR THIS FIGHTING LARK! RIGHT NOW, I'D GIVE ANYTHING FOR A TRANSFER—AND THAT'S A FACT!

SPANDAUS WERE YAMMERING FRANTICALLY AND MAUSERS WERE THUMPING OUT A CONTINUOUS ACCOMPANIMENT. YET THE CURTAIN OF LEAD DID NOT SLOW DOWN THE ATTACK.
SHOW 'EM THE COLD STEEL, BOYS! THAT'S SOMETHING A JERRY CAN'T STOMACH!
THEN I AIN'T NO DIFF'RENT FROM A JERRY! I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO STOMACH IT, NEITHER!

SHAKEN AND CONFUSED, PRIVATE JOE CULLIS SAW HIS COMPANY COMMANDER AND HIS COMRADES PITCHING INTO HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT WITH THE ENEMY.
THEY'RE LIKE A PACK OF BULL-TERRIERS! MAYBE THAT'S HOW A BLOKE FEELS WHEN HE'S BEEN IN ACTION A FEW TIMES.

ALTHOUGH THE GERMANS FOUGHT BACK TENACIOUSLY, THE RIDGE WAS TAKEN...
WE'VE GOT 'EM ON THE RUN, MEN!

THERE WAS A MOVEMENT BEHIND JOE CURTIS. BIG BILL SPOTTED IT AND ACTED LIKE LIGHTNING.
LOOK OUT, CURTIS!
GOOD SHOOTING, SIR!

CURTIS GULPED AS HE REALISED HOW NARROW HAD BEEN HIS ESCAPE.

I OWE ME BLOOMIN' SKIN TO THE MAJOR. IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR HIM, THAT DO-OR-DIE JERRY WOULD'VE GOT ME — AND MAYBE A FEW MORE OF US, AN' ALL!

MEANWHILE, TO EAST AND WEST THE SOUND OF HEAVY FIRING WAS BUILDING UP...

THERE'S A PROPER BARNEY GOIN' ON OVER TO RIGHT AND LEFT OF US!

IT'S THE OTHER TWO BATTALIONS — THEY'RE DRIVING NORTH AS WELL, ONE ON EACH SIDE OF OUR MOB.

THREE SUBALTERNS PRESENTLY REPORTED TO BIG BILL.

TEN PLATOON'S BEEN TOLD TO REORGANISE AND DIG IN, SIR.

THE SAME GOES FOR ELEVEN, MAJOR SUTTON.

AND FOR TWELVE, SIR.

BIG BILL LOOKED THEM OVER, AND SNORTED...
YOU'VE TAKEN A LOT FOR GRANTED! WE'RE NOT DIGGING IN—WE'RE PRESSING ON TO THAT NEXT FEATURE!

THE PLATOON COMMANDERS EXCHANGED HESITANT GLANCES...
DO YOU THINK THAT'S WISE, SIR? I MEAN, SHOULDN'T WE EXERCISE A LITTLE CAUTION..?
CAUTION, MISTER JENNER? WHAT THE BAM HILL HAS 'CAUTION' GOT TO DO WITH WINNING A BATTLE?

THE COLONEL GAVE ME THE RIDGE AS THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE AND SAID I COULD USE MY DISCRETION ONCE IT WAS IN OUR HANDS. RIGHT— WE ADVANCE!

AS THE MAJOR STRUTTED AWAY, THE LIEUTENANT NAMED JENNER MUTTERED DUBIOUSLY...
THE CHANCES HE TAKES! HE'LL GET THIS ENTIRE COMPANY WIPED OUT ONE OF THESE DAYS, FERRER.
YOU KNOW HIS TROUBLE, DON'T YOU? HE COMES OF A MILITARY FAMILY THAT INCLUDES TWO V.C.S. HE HAS A LOT TO LIVE UP TO, HAS SUTTON!

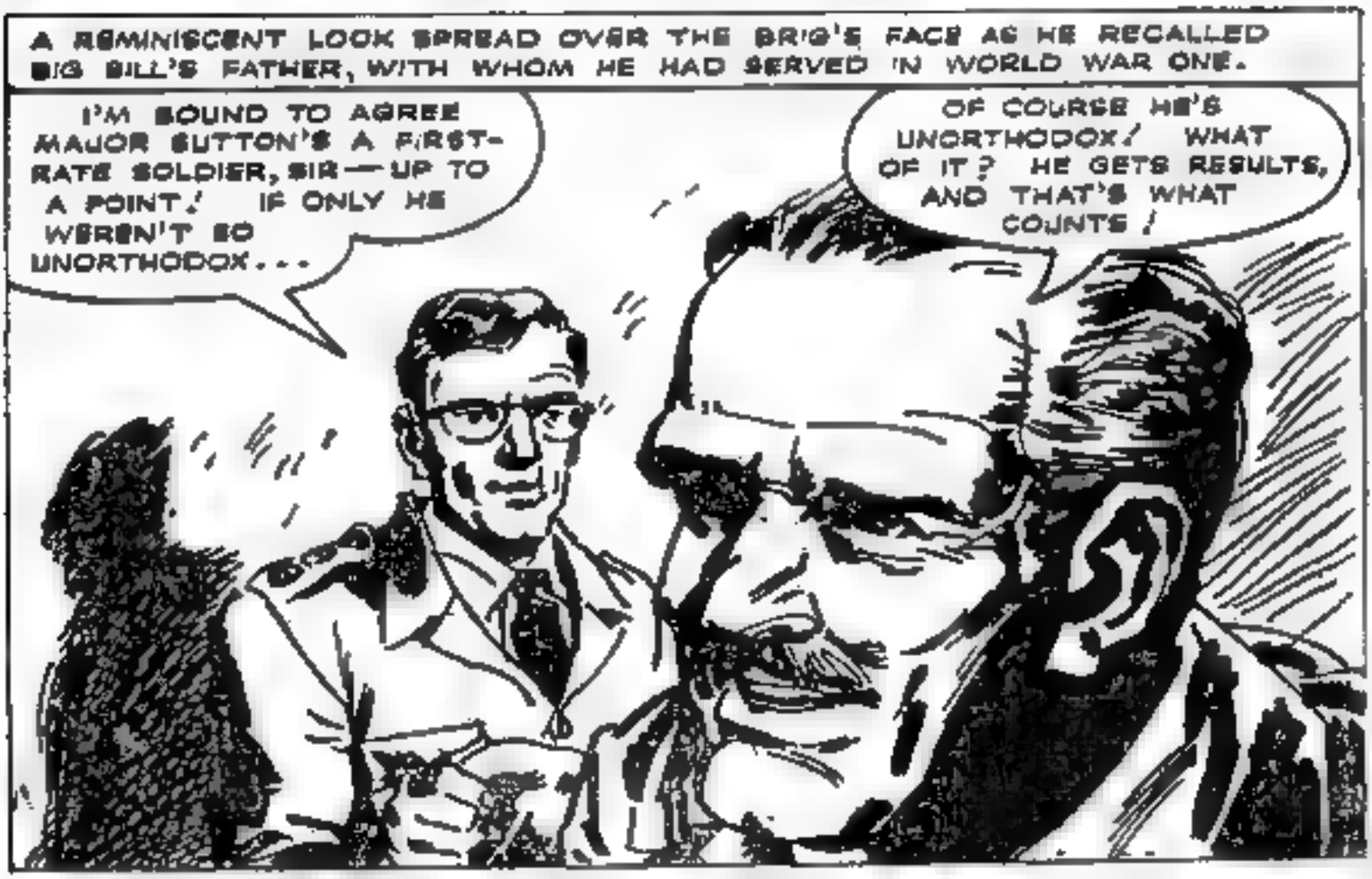
"B" COMPANY ABANDONED DIGGING OPERATIONS AND FORMED UP IN OPEN ORDER AGAIN.
YOU'VE ALL DONE WELL, LADS, BUT WE'RE NOT RESTING ON OUR LAURELS. WE'RE GOING TO CHUCK THE BOCHES OFF THAT NEXT RIDGE!

THE COMPANY SHOOK OUT INTO ANOTHER FORMATION.
ORDER OF BATTLE — TWO UP, TWO BACK. TEN PLATOON ON THE RIGHT, ELEVEN ON THE LEFT, TWELVE IN RESERVE. LET'S GO!
HE'S FOUR-FIFTHS GLORY-HUNTER, AND ONE-FIFTH GAMBLER! BUT I'LL SAY THIS FOR HIM, HE'S ALWAYS [redacted] A LUCKY STREAK — SO FAR!

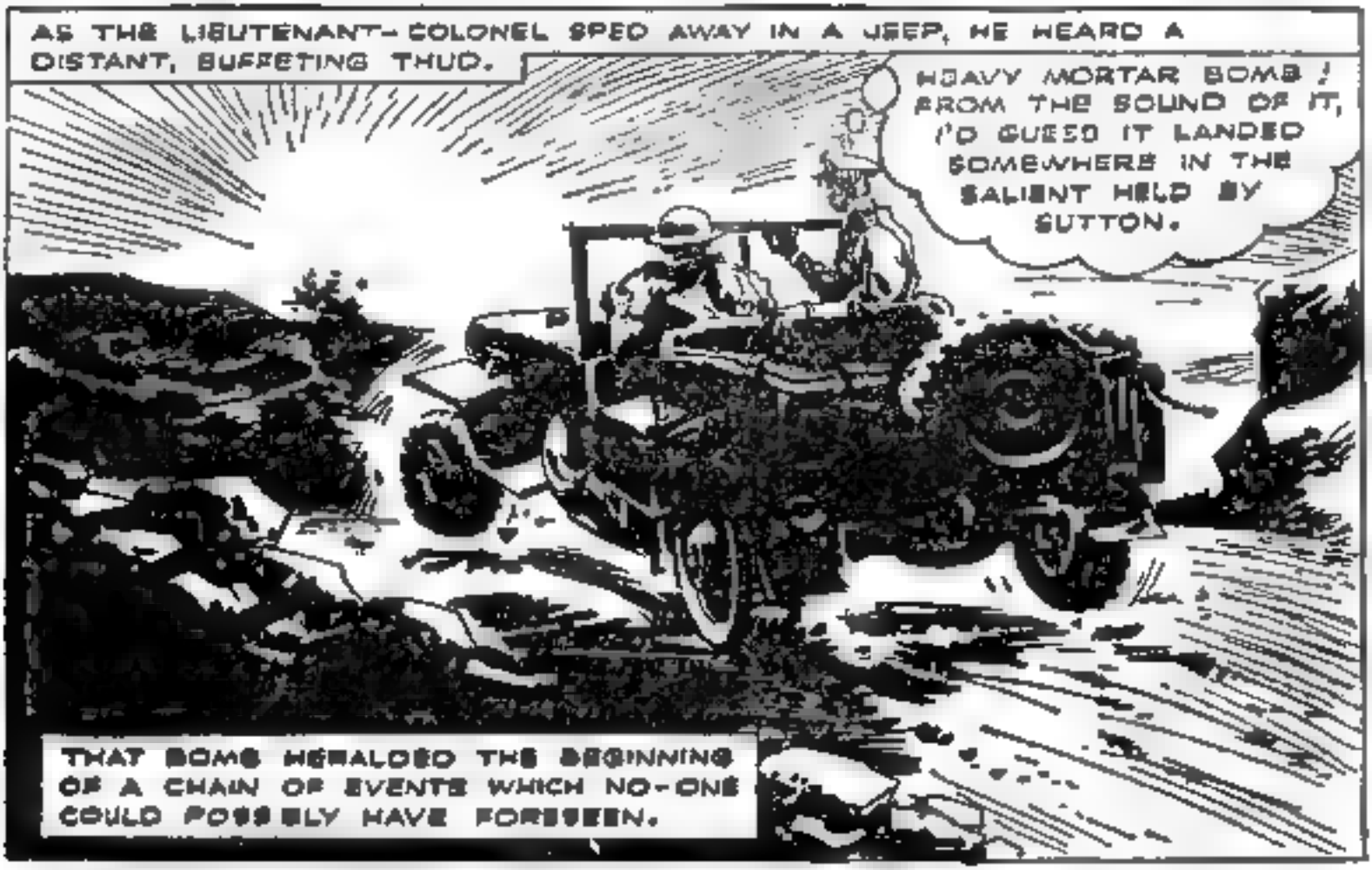
THAT NIGHT, B.G BILL'S LUCK SEEMED TO HOLD GOOD. THE SECOND RIDGE WAS SEIZED AGAINST HALF-HEARTED GERMAN RESISTANCE.
SEND BACK A 'SIT-REP' TO THE C.O. TELL HIM WE'RE ON H'LL ONE-FOUR-FIVE, A THOUSAND YARDS BEYOND OUR PRIMARY OBJECTIVE. I'M OFF TO CHECK UP ON OUR LOSSES.

WHEN THE MAJOR RETURNED TO HIS WIRELESS OPERATOR...
THE COLONEL SAYS THE BATTALIONS ON OUR FLANKS HAVE FAILED TO MAKE HEADWAY. WE'RE STICKIN' OUT LIKE A SORE THUMB, SO WE'RE TO PULL BACK.
PULL BACK? NOT LIKELY!
DESPITE THE GLOOM, BILL SUTTON'S COMPLEXION SHOWED UP AS BRICK-RED. HIS TEMPER WAS ON THE BOIL...
LIKE A SORE THUMB, ARE WE? THEN IF JERRY TRIES TO LOP IT OFF WE'LL POKE HIM IN THE EYE WITH IT! YOU TELL THE COLONEL THAT FROM ME!
TELL HIM WE FORGOT TO BUY RETURN-TICKETS. IF HE WANTS US BACK HE'LL HAVE TO GET THE BRIG TO COME AND FETCH US— IN PERSON! TELL HIM THAT AND THEN SIGN OFF WITHOUT GIVING HIM A CHANCE TO REPLY!

BIG BILL'S DEFIANT MESSAGE WAS SENT TO THE BRIGADIER, WHO HOOTED DELIGHTEDLY !
NO RETURN TICKETS ? BY GEORGE, THAT'S THE SORT OF THING HIS FATHER WOULD'VE SAID ! WHY THE DEVIL HAVEN'T I MORE OFFICERS LIKE BILL SUTTON ?


A REMINISCENT LOOK SPREAD OVER THE BRIG'S FACE AS HE RECALLED BIG BILL'S FATHER, WITH WHOM HE HAD SERVED IN WORLD WAR ONE.
I'M BOUND TO AGREE MAJOR SUTTON'S A FIRST-RATE SOLDIER, SIR — UP TO A POINT ! IF ONLY HE WEREN'T SO UNORTHODOX . . .
OF COURSE HE'S UNORTHODOX ! WHAT OF IT ? HE GETS RESULTS, AND THAT'S WHAT COUNTS !

THE "BRASS-HAT" WALKED WITH BILL'S COMMANDING OFFICER TO THE DOOR OF BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS.
THERE'S A WELL-TRIED MILITARY PRINCIPLE, COLONEL — 'REINFORCE SUCCESS'. THAT'S THE DRILL WE'LL FOLLOW IN THIS CASE.


AS THE LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SPED AWAY IN A JEEP, HE HEARD A DISTANT, BUFFETING THUD.
HEAVY MORTAR BOMB! FROM THE SOUND OF IT, I'D GUESS IT LANDED SOMEWHERE IN THE SALIENT HELD BY SUTTON.
THAT BOMB HERALDED THE BEGINNING OF A CHAIN OF EVENTS WHICH NO-ONE COULD POSSIBLY HAVE FORSEEN.

Chapter 2. Slaughter Valley

LITTLE JOE CURTIS GULPED. HE COULD HARDLY BELIEVE HE HAD HEARD RIGHT...
YOU DON'T MEAN— YOU WANT ME TO GO WITH YOU — SIR..?
OF COURSE I DO, YOU IDIOT! YOUR JOB IS TO STICK CLOSE TO ME IN ACTION, IN CASE I NEED YOU TO CARRY MESSAGES.

PULSE POUNDING, JOE STARTED TO PAD ALONG NERVOUSLY IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF HIS MASTER.
NO DENYING IT, THE MAJOR'S A PERISHING HERO, ALL RIGHT. SOONER OR LATER, HE'S BOUND TO GET A VICTORIA CROSS— IF HE DOESN'T GET A WOODEN ONE!

UNFLINCHINGLY BIG BILL MARCHED ON OVER THE CROWN OF THE RIDGE.
BOOSTS THEIR MORALE WHEN THEY SEE ME IN THE THICK OF THINGS. NOT THAT IT SEEMS TO BE DOING MUCH FOR THE MORALE OF THE LITTLE SQUIRT WHO'S MY NEW BATMAN.

THE MAJOR HALTED AMONG SOME OF THE FORWARD POSITIONS.
I DON'T NEED TO TELL YOU OLD HANDS THE PATTERN. THIS MORTARING'S THE PRELUDE TO A COUNTER-ATTACK. SEE YOU GIVE THE BOCHES ALL YOU'VE GOT WHEN THEY COME. MEANWHILE, KEEP YOUR HEADS DOWN!
KEEP YOUR HEADS DOWN, HE TELLS 'EM! WHAT ABOUT MY BONCE?

A FEW WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT FOR EACH PLATOON AND FINALLY BIG BILL SUTTON RETRACED HIS STEPS WITH LITTLE JOE.

WE'VE A COMPANY COMMANDER IN A THOUSAND, MATE. HE AIN'T SCARED OF NOTHING!

IF YOU ASK ME, HE'S CRACKERS, STROLLIN' AROUND WITH ALL THIS MUCK FLYIN' ABOUT. I WOULDN'T DO IT FOR A CHESTFUL O' MEDALS!

WHEN THE MORTARING CEASED, THE ENEMY ATTACKED. BUT THE COUNTER-FIRE OF "B" COMPANY D.D NOT ALLOW THEM TO GET VERY FAR...

AAAGH!

THE GERMANS BACKED OFF. SILENCE HAD DESCENDED ON THAT SALIENT AGAIN WHEN THE COMPANY RADIO-OPERATOR REPORTED TO BILL SUTTON...
A FLASH FROM THE COLONEL, SIR. 'A' AND 'C' COMPANIES ARE MOVING UP TO REINFORCE US.
THAT MEANS SOMEBODY IN AUTHORITY MUST HAVE SEEN THINGS MY WAY. GOOD!

"A" AND "C" COMPANIES OF THE BATTALION WERE SOON ON THE MARCH AT A FAST PACE. THEY CROSSED THE FIRST RIDGE "B" COMPANY HAD TAKEN.
THERE'S HILL ONE-FOUR-FIVE ACROSS THE VALLEY. NOT MUCH FARTHER TO GO, LADS.

THOSE WERE TRAGICALLY PROPHETIC WORDS. THE TWO COMPANIES WERE STRUNG OUT OVER THE VALLEY WHEN DEATH HIT THEM LIKE A SUDDEN SQUALL!
NOW, MENSCHEN— RAPID FIRE!

THE NAZIS HAD RUSHED RESERVES TO THE WINGS OF THE SALIENT. FROM ONE FLANK, A BLIZZARD OF LEAD SWEPT "A" AND "C" COMPANIES...
WE'RE CAUGHT IN ENFILADE. IT'LL BE A MIRACLE IF ANY OF US COME OUT OF THIS ALIVE!

THE ENGLISHMEN MADE PERFECT TARGETS FOR THE MACHINE GUNNERS. THEN SALVOES OF HIGH EXPLOSIVE ARCHED THROUGH THE A.R FROM THE OTHER FLANK...
OBSERVER TO MORTAR-BATTERY COMMANDER— ON TARGET. NO CORRECTIONS...
FROM HILL 145'S SOUTH SLOPE, BILL SUTTON LOOKED DOWN ON THAT SLAUGHTER-YARD IN SORROW AND DISMAY.
NOT ONE OF 'EM GOT HERE. ONLY A HANDFUL MANAGED TO BACK-TRACK. THE REST, ALL DEAD OR WOUNDED. TWO HUNDRED MEN WRITTEN OFF...
A FEW MINUTES LATER, C.S.M. BANNON CAME HURRYING DOWN FROM THE CROWN OF THE HILL...
MAJOR SUTTON, A GERMAN OFFICER IS ON HIS WAY UP THE FORWARD SLOPE WITH A FLAG OF TRUCE!

ANGRILY, B.G. BILL CROSSED THE CROWN OF THE RIDGE TO RECEIVE THE GERMAN OFFICER ON THE NORTH SLOPE.
I AM HERE ON THE INSTRUCTIONS OF MAJOR DRENSCH, MY COMMANDING OFFICER. IT MUST BE OBVIOUS TO YOU THAT YOU ARE IN A HOPELESS SITUATION, SO HE INVITES YOU TO SURRENDER.

B'G BILL'S ANSWER WAS BRIEF, BLUNT AND TO THE POINT...
LEUTNANT, I'VE AN APPROPRIATE SUGGESTION FOR A MAN WITH A NAME LIKE YOUR COMMANDING OFFICER'S — YOU GO TELL MAJOR DRENSCH TO TAKE A RUNNING JUMP IN THE NEAREST LAKE!

IN DUE COURSE, THE GERMAN SUBALTERN REPEATED BILL SUTTON'S REPLY TO A HARD-FACED SUPERIOR. ODDLY ENOUGH, THE LATTER SEEMED WELL SATISFIED WITH IT...
GOOD! I'D HAVE BEEN OBLIGED TO GO BACK ON MY OFFER ANYHOW. A DIRECTIVE FROM 'DIVISION' HAS JUST BEEN PASSED TO ME — INFORMING ME OF A HIGH-LEVEL DECISION.
ACH, SO, HERR MAJOR?

OUR UNIT WILL CONFINE ITSELF TO PATROL ACTIVITY AGAINST THE ENGLANDERS MERELY TO KEEP A CHECK ON THEM. INCIDENTALLY, THE LUFTWAFFE REPORTS THAT ENEMY ARMOUR IS ON THE MOVE SOUTH OF THE SALIENT.

AT THAT VERY MOMENT, THE SAME INFORMATION WAS BEING GIVEN TO BIG BILL SUTTON...
SUTTON? THIS IS BRIGADIER BENTLEY. I JUST WANT TO GIVE YOU A MESSAGE FIRST-HAND. LORRIED INFANTRY ARE BEING SENT UP TO YOU UNDER ESCORT OF TWO TROOPS OF SHERMANS...

ARRANGEMENTS WON'T BE COMPLETE TILL FIRST LIGHT TOMORROW. MEANTIME, HANG ON TO THAT RIDGE TOOTH AND NAIL. GOOD LUCK, SUTTON, YOU CAN RELY ON ME TO PULL OUT ALL THE STOPS IN SUPPORTING YOU!

TRUE TO THE BRIG'S RADIO MESSAGE, A MOBILE FORCE RUMBLED NORTHWARD THROUGH THE NECK OF THE SALIENT AT DAWN NEXT DAY...

TANKS AND TRUCKS ENTERED THAT VALLEY OF DEATH AND EYES SEARCHED ALERTLY.
SUNRAY CALLING. ALL GUNNERS MAINTAIN CLOSE WATCH ON FLANKS. FIRE IMMEDIATELY YOU SEE A TARGET...

NEVERTHELESS, IT WAS FROM A NAZI GUN THAT THE FIRST BLOW WAS DIRECTED...
THERE IS VICTIM NUMBER ONE, KAMERADEN!

AN ARMOUR-PIERCING SHELL LASHED TOWARDS ITS TARGET IN FLAT TRAJECTORY. IT MISSED, THOUGH ONLY BY A FRACTION!
SEE THAT MUZZLE FLASH, GUNNER? START FIRING—AND KEEP FIRING TILL YOU SCORE A HIT!

ONE SHOT, AND THE ENEMY ANTI-TANK GUN IN THE COPSE WAS OUT OF BUSINESS.
AAARGH!

BUT NEXT SECOND...
WE'VE RUN SLAP ON TO A MINE!

ONE TRACK RIPPED ASUNDER, THE CRIPPLED IRONCLAD LURCHED TO A GRINDING HALT. IN THE SAME INSTANT, ANOTHER ANTI TANK GUN OPENED UP...
A DIRECT HIT!

THEN THE VALLEY ECHOED TO A SEQUENCE OF SHATTERING CONCUSSIONS, AS MINES EXPLODED AND GUNS BARKED VICIOUSLY.
THE JERRIES MUST'VE BOOBY-TRAPPED THE GROUND IN THE NIGHT, MATES!

THE RELIEVING FORCE TOOK TERRIBLE PUNISHMENT. NOT A SINGLE VEHICLE WON ITS WAY TO HILL 145. ONLY A FEW SURVIVED THE CARNAGE TO WITHDRAW...
IF YOU ASK ME, THE BRIG'S FLOGGIN' A DEAD HORSE TRYIN' TO GET REINFORCEMENTS THROUGH TO 'B' COMPANY!

Chapter 3. The Vultures Strike

JOE CURTIS RAISED A YOWL THAT WAS FIT TO WAKEN THE DEAD, NEVER MIND ANY OF HIS COMRADES WHO CHANCED TO BE ASLEEP.
JERRIES! SUFFERING WILDCATS! HELP! HELP!

HE TRIGGERED HIS RIFLE WILDLY — BUT THE BULLET SPED INEFFECTUALLY OVER THE ATTACKERS' HEADS.
ACH, GIVE HIM THE BUTT, ONE OF YOU!

THE HEEL OF A MAUSER DROVE INTO THE BATMAN'S SKULL WITH A JOLT THAT RATTLED HIS TEETH... AND HIS WITS.

UGH!

TWO OF THE GERMANS DROPPED INTO THE SLIT-TRENCH TO LAY HOLD OF THE SAGGING FORM OF LITTLE JOE.

HURRY, YOU TWO! DRAG HIM OUT OF THERE AND WE'LL BE ON OUR WAY! I THINK I HEAR SOMEONE COMING.

SURE ENOUGH, SOMEONE WAS CHARGING DOWN THE SLOPE — MAJOR BILL SUTTON.

JERRIES, BY THUNDER!

SHOTS SPLIT THE NIGHT AIR, QUICKLY FOLLOWED BY THE GROANS OF TWO GERMANS AS THEY CRUMPLED TO THE GROUND.

IT'S NO USE, HELMUT! RUN FOR IT!

THE REMAINING GERMANS FLED, AMID A SCATTER OF BULLETS FIRED BY LIEUTENANT JENNER AND SEVERAL MEN OF HIS PLATOON.

CAUGHT NAPPING, CURTIS, WERE YOU? DOZING ON DUTY, I SHOULDN'T WONDER...

THE MAJOR TRIED IN VAIN TO ROUSE JOE.
ONE OF THE JERRIES — THE OFFICER — IS ALIVE, S.R, BUT UNCONSCIOUS.
CURTIS IS OUT COLD, TOO! SEE THAT HE AND THE JERRY OFFICER ARE CARTED TO THE DUG-OUT THE NAZIS WERE USING BEFORE WE KICKED 'EM OFF THE HILL.

JOE AND THE ENEMY LEUTNANT WERE LIFTED AND CARRIED OVER THE BROW OF THE SLOPE.
I'LL RESUME MY TOUR OF INSPECTION. JENNER, QUIZ THAT JERRY OFFICER WHEN HE COMES ROUND — HE MIGHT LET SLIP SOME USEFUL INFORMATION.

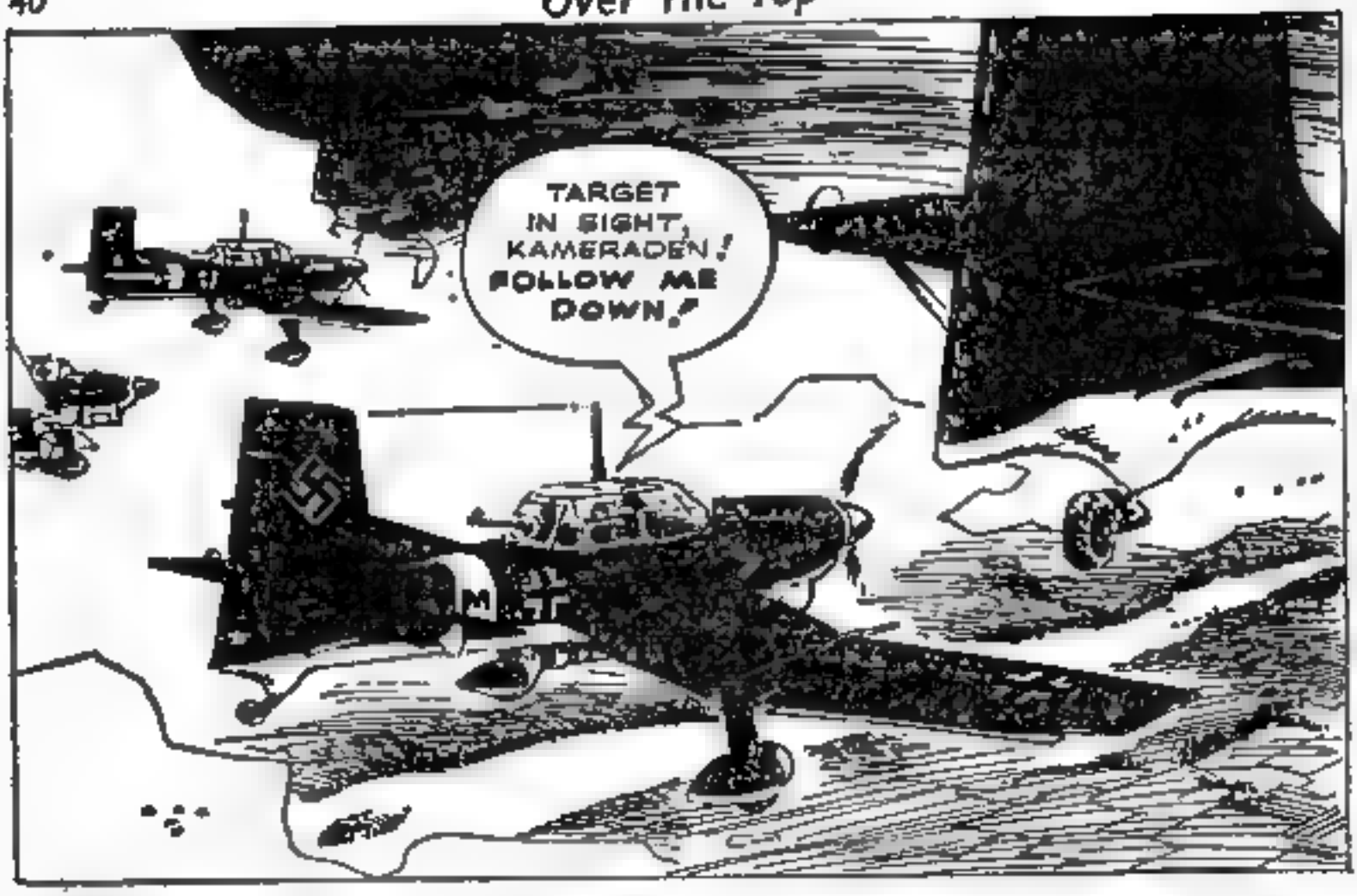
TWENTY MINUTES LATER, BILL SUTTON LOOKED IN AT THE DUG-OUT WHICH HAD FORMERLY BEEN A GERMAN COMMAND-POST.
HE'S AWAKE, THEN? WHAT'S HE SAYING? YOU'RE THE BLOKE THAT KNOWS THE BOCHE LINGO, JENNER.
KÖDER... KÖDER...
HE'S NOT SAYING ANYTHING THAT MAKES SENSE, SIR. HE'S DELIRIOUS.
CURTIS IS STILL DEAD TO THE WORLD.
CONCUSSION, I SUPPOSE...
BEG PARDON, MAJOR SUTTON. A MESSAGE FROM BRIGADE.
ALL RIGHT, LAD, WHAT IS IT? SPIT IT OUT.
WE CAN EXPECT TO HEAR ANOTHER FLARE UP TO THE SOUTH, SIR. THE BRIGADIER'S LAID ON A NIGHT-ATTACK.

AT THAT POINT A DEEP-TONED THROBBING BECAME AUDIBLE TO THE NORTH. FROWNING, BILL SUTTON STAMPED FROM THE DUG-OUT.

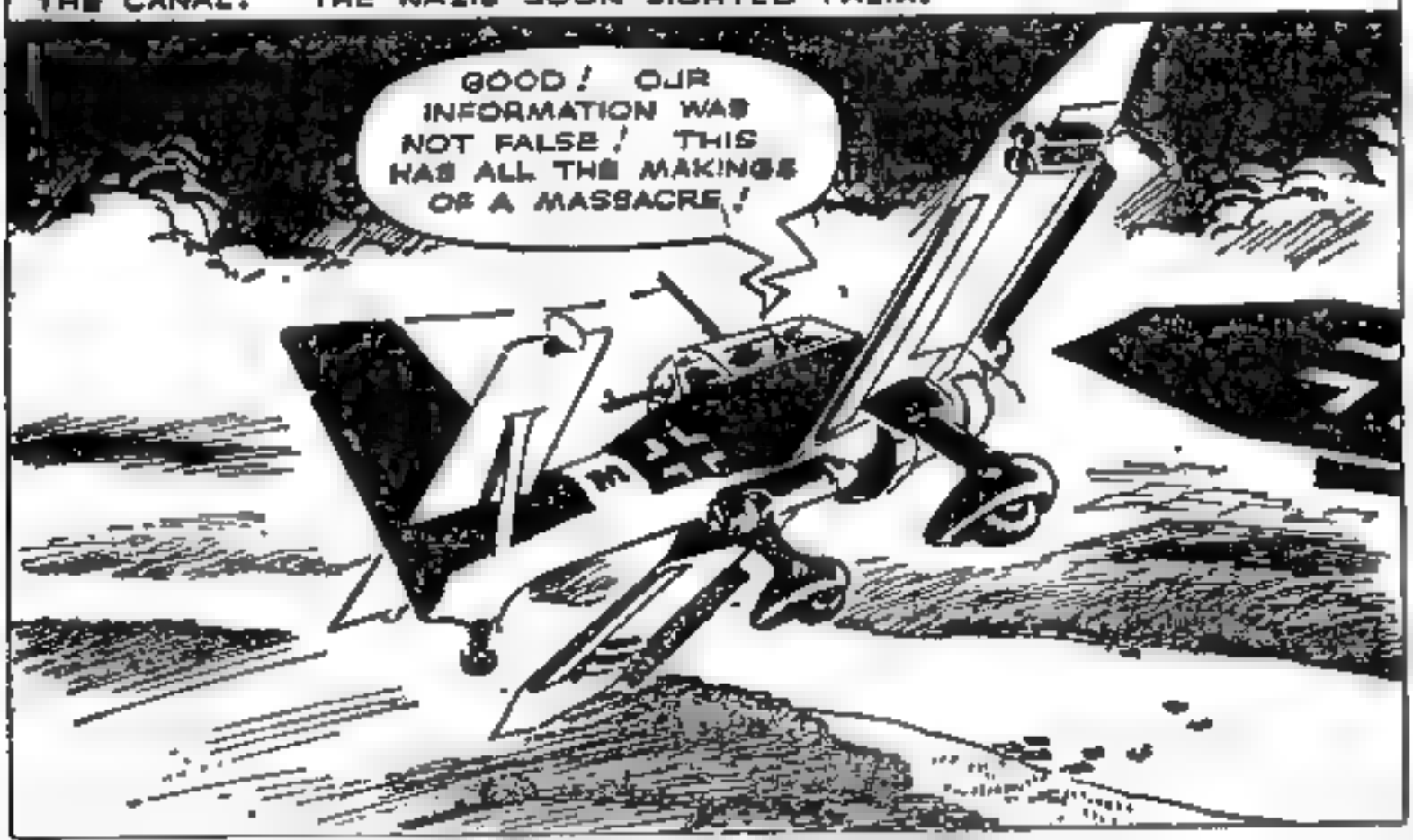
AIRCRAFT—AND THEY AREN'T OURS! BY THUNDER, D'YOU SUPPOSE THE BOCHE HAVE BEEN TIPPED OFF ABOUT THE ATTACK? THERE ARE STILL GERMAN SYMPATHISERS AMONG THE SYTIE POPULATION.

THE ONCOMING PLANES WERE JUNKER-87s— AND THEIR OBJECTIVE WAS THE START-LINE OF THE BRITISH NIGHT-ATTACK.

ACHTUNG, KAMERADEN! APPROACHING THE BENITO CANAL. UNLESS WE'VE BEEN FED FALSE INFORMATION, THAT'S WHERE THE ENGLANDERS WILL BE FORMING UP.



BELOW, BRITISH TROOPS WERE MUSTERING ON THE NORTH BANK OF THE CANAL. THE NAZIS SOON SIGHTED THEM.



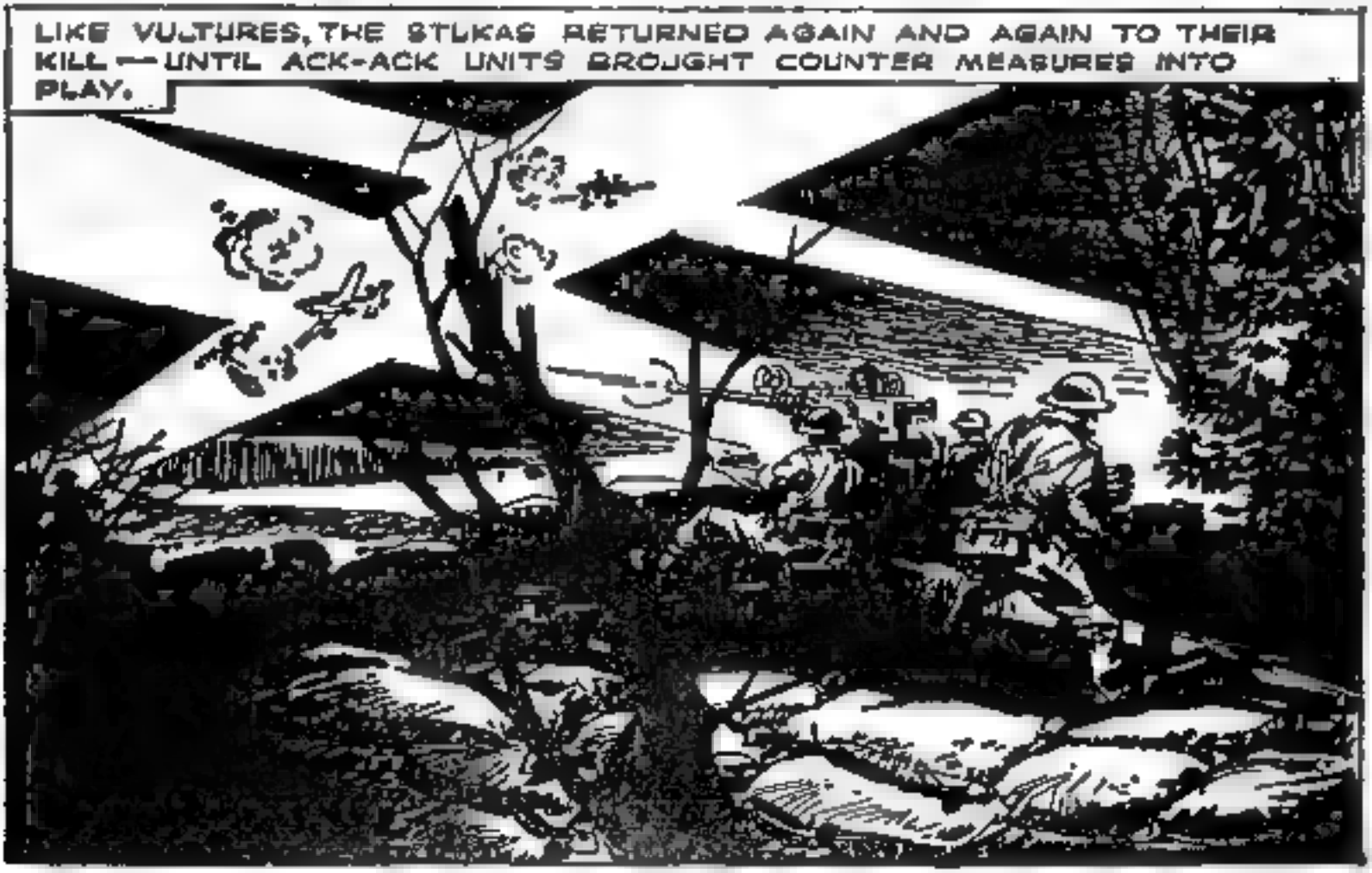
BOMBS PLUMMETED FROM WING-RACKS AND HIT THE TARGET WITH TERRIFYING BLASTS...

BATCHES OF SMALL BOMBS WERE DROPPED, AS WELL. THEY BOUNCED WAIST-HIGH BEFORE DETONATING AND TOOK TERRIBLE TOLL.
GET DOWN, MEN! HIT THE DECK!

THEN THE STUKAS CAME IN AGAIN, RAKING THE SCATTERED ENGLISHMAN VICIOUSLY.
THEY'RE COMPLETELY AT OUR MERCY!
Blam!

THE BULLET-THRASHED GROUND OFFERED NO COVER TO THOSE DOOMED MEN.
WE HAVEN'T A CHANCE! IF ONLY WE COULD HIT BACK!

MEN PERISHED BY THE SCORE UNDER THE ONSLAUGHT, GASPING OUT THEIR LIVES ON DRY LAND OR IN THE SOMBRE WATER...
THANKS, MATE... THANKS...


LIKE VULTURES, THE STUKAS RETURNED AGAIN AND AGAIN TO THEIR KILL — UNTIL ACK-ACK UNITS BROUGHT COUNTER MEASURES INTO PLAY.

PROBING SEARCHLIGHTS FOUND THE LUFTWAFFE BUTCHERS AND SALVOES OF 3.7-INCH SHELLS BLASTED THE AIR ALL AROUND THEM.
ACHTUNG, KAMERADEN! BREAK OFF! THE ENEMY FLAK IS BECOMING TOO ACCURATE!

THE LUFTWAFFE PILOTS TURNED TAIL AND MADE TRACKS FOR THEIR NORTHWARD BASE.
THE GUNNERS HAVE SORTED THEM OUT!

BUT THE NAZI FLYERS HAD ACCOMPLISHED THEIR TASK, HOWEVER — THERE WOULD BE NO NIGHT ATTACK.
BEARERS! STRETCHER-BEARERS!

Chapter 4. For Valour

THEY WANT US TO STAY PUT, AS BAIT. IT SUITS THEM TO WIPE OUT SUCCESSIVE RELIEF-FORCES. MEANWHILE, THEY'RE BUILDING UP THEIR STRENGTH TO ATTACK WHEN THEY JUDGE THE DIVISION'S BEEN CRITICALLY WEAKENED!

THE MAJOR STOOD SILENT AND MOTIONLESS FOR SOME MOMENTS. THEN HE TURNED AND WALKED AWAY.
YOU'VE GIVEN HIM FOOD FOR THOUGHT, MISTER JENNER.
I MEANT TO. IF HE HAS ANY SENSE, HE'LL TRY TO GET US OUT OF HERE.

A QUARTER OF AN HOUR ELAPSED BEFORE BIG B LL REAPPEARED...
MISTER JENNER, I'M NOT REFERRING BACK FOR INSTRUCTIONS, I'M ACTING OFF MY OWN BAT. THE COMPANY W LL WITHDRAW. GET THE OTHER PLATOON COMMANDERS HERE...

BY MIDNIGHT, THE MEN OF "S" COMPANY WERE READY TO MOVE OUT...
WE'RE IN LUCK— THERE'S A MIST IN THE VALLEY. TAKE THINGS SLOWLY AND QUIETLY, AND WHEN YOU'RE THROUGH, SEND UP A SUCCESS SIGNAL— GREEN OVER RED OVER GREEN.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND, SIR. YOU SOUND AS THOUGH YOU WEREN'T COMING WITH US.

THE COMPANY COMMANDER STUCK OUT HIS JAW...
I'M NOT! JERRY PATROLS KEEP A CLOSE TAG ON US ALL ALONG OUR FRONT. IF THEY FOUND OUT YOU'D GONE, YOU'D NEVER MAKE IT. I'LL SEE THEY DON'T FIND OUT— UNTIL IT'S TOO LATE!

NO AMOUNT OF ARGUMENT WOULD MAKE THE MAJOR RECONSIDER.
SIR, WE'VE DONE WHAT WE COULD FOR THE WOUNDED JERRY OFFICER AND LEFT HIM IN THE DUG-OUT. HE'S STILL RAMBLING.
AND WHAT ABOUT THAT USELESS BATMAN OF MINE—CURTIS? I HEAR HE RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS THIS MORNING.

THE C.S M. INFORMED HIM THE BATMAN WAS FIT ENOUGH TO WALK AND HAD FALLEN IN WITH THE REST OF THE COMPANY.
KEEP AN EYE ON HIM, ESPECIALLY WHERE THE GOING'S TRICKY. IN A TIGHT CORNER HE MIGHT GIVE THE WHOLE SHOW AWAY. OFF YOU GO, SERGEANT-MAJOR!

STOOPING, BIG BILL GATHERED UP A PEN AND A STACK OF MAGAZINES.
I ONLY HOPE THEY GET BACK. IF THEY DON'T, THE WEIGHT ALREADY ON MY CONSCIENCE WILL BE THAT MUCH THE HEAVIER.

BROODINGLY, HE TURNED AND STUMBLED OVER THE HILL TO THE NORTH SLOPE
LET'S FACE IT — MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE I WANTED TO EARN A V.C. — THE THIRD IN THE FAMILY. BUT I DIDN'T COUNT THE COST IN OTHER LIVES...

IN HIS MOOD OF SELF-REPROACH, HE HAD FAILED TO NOTE THE PRESENCE OF AN ENEMY PATROL BELOW—UNTIL TOO LATE.

GOOD GRIEF!

PAIN STABBED THROUGH HIS LEGS. HIS FACE WORKED WITH WRATH AND ANGUISH AS HE TRIED IN VAIN TO RISE.

A COUPLE OF SMASHED SHINS BY THE FEEL OF IT... I CAN'T EVEN CRAWL. THOSE JERRIES'LL GET TO THE GUNS BEFORE EVER I CAN...

HE THOUGHT OF THE BUTCHERY HIS MEN WOULD SUFFER WHEN THE ENEMY LEARNED THEY WERE WITHDRAWING.

THE WAY I SHOT OFF MY MOUTH TO JENNER AND THE OTHERS—THE BIG HERO, ME! I WAS TO COVER THE RETREAT—AND LOOK AT ME NOW!

IT WAS IN THAT MOMENT OF DESPAIR THAT SOMETHING RUSHED BY IN A BLUR OF KHAKI.
I DON'T BELIEVE IT! IT — IT'S...

BUT IT WAS NO ILLUSION. IT WAS THE FIGURE OF A BRITISH TOMMY. THERE WAS NOT MUCH OF HIM, BUT HE WAS FLESH—
CURTIS!

CURTIS FETCHED UP BEHIND THE BREN IN A SPATTER OF LEAD. HE SEIZED THE L.M.G. AND STITCHED THE NIGHT WITH A LONG HAMMERING BURST.

WHITTLED DOWN TO HALF-STRENGTH, THE ENEMY PATROL MELTED INTO THE MURK OF THE NIGHT.

THEY'RE SCARPERIN'! THANK GOODNESS FOR THAT! NOW I'D BETTER GO AN' SEE WHAT I CAN DO FOR THE MAJOR.

LITTLE JOE TURNED AND PADDED UP TO WHERE THE COMPANY COMMANDER LAY.

WHERE THE DICKENS DID YOU SPRING FROM?

I COME BACK, SIR, AS SOON'S I HEARD YOU WEREN'T WITH THE COLUMN. YOU TOLD ME I WAS TO STICK CLOSE TO YOU IN ACTION, REMEMBER?

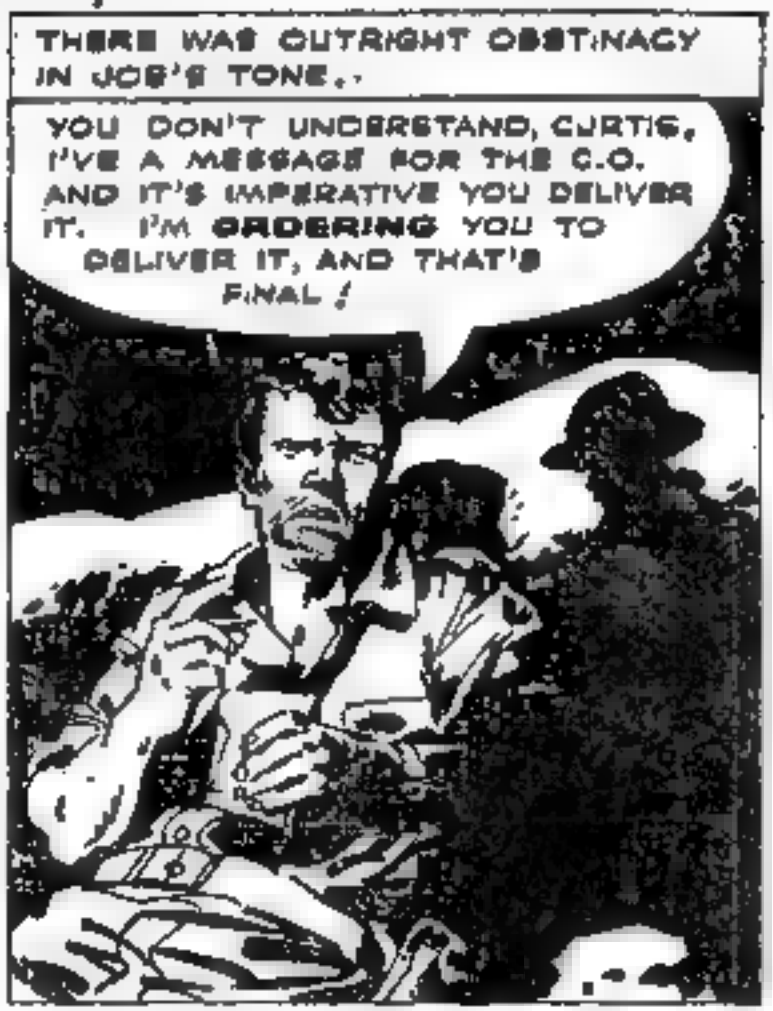
THE BATMAN HESITATED, THEN BLURTED OUT A FURTHER REASON FOR HIS RETURN TO HILL 145.
BESIDES, SIR, IF—IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR YOU, I WOULDN'T BE ALIVE AND KICKIN' NOW.

HE BOUND UP THE MAJOR'S INJURIES AS BEST HE COULD, FAINT FROM PAIN AND LOSS OF BLOOD, BIG BILL SPOKE TO HIM HUSKILY.
KEEP MOVING AROUND THE RIDGE, CURTIS. IF THE JERRIES RUN TRUE TO FORM THEY'LL PROBE AT OUR POSITIONS ALL NIGHT LONG. IT'S UP TO YOU TO MAKE SURE THEY DON'T COTTON-ON THAT THE COMPANY'S FLOWN THE COOP.

AFTER THAT, BILL SUTTON PASSED OUT FOR A WHILE. HE CAME ROUND IN TIME TO SEE THE TAIL-END OF A SAVAGE AFFRAY.
AND I THOUGHT CURTIS WAS A USELESS LITTLE SQUIRT! NEVER AGAIN WILL I CLAIM TO BE A JUDGE OF MEN!

IN THE NEXT HOUR HE WAS EYE-WITNESS TO A SUCCESSION OF DESPERATE SKIRMISHES BETWEEN H'S BATMAN AND ENEMY RECCE-PATROLS.
EVERYTHING'S BEEN DEAD-QUIET NOW FOR —
LOOK! AWAY TO THE SOUTH! VERGY LIGHTS! GREEN OVER RED OVER GREEN! THE COMPANY'S SAFE! RIGHT, CURTIS, YOU'VE DONE YOUR STUFF — NOW YOU CAN HOP IT!

JOE LOOKED AT HIM DOGGEDLY...
NO, SIR. YOU CAN'T MOVE AND I AIN'T STRONG ENOUGH TO CARRY YOU.. BUT I AIN'T SLOPIN' OFF AND LEAVIN' YOU ON YOUR OWN.


THERE WAS OUTRIGHT OBSTINACY IN JOE'S TONE..
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, CURTIS, I'VE A MESSAGE FOR THE C.O. AND IT'S IMPERATIVE YOU DELIVER IT. I'M ORDERING YOU TO DELIVER IT, AND THAT'S FINAL!

HANDICAPPED AS HE WAS BY THE GLOOM AND BY HIS SUFFERINGS, THE COMPANY COMMANDER WROTE IN HIS NOTEBOOK.
TAKE THIS, SOLDIER — AND REMEMBER, I'M DEPENDING ON YOU TO GET BACK THROUGH THE SALIENT.

RELUCTANTLY, JOE CURTIS MADE HIS WAY OVER THE CREST.
I WONDER WHAT HE'LL SAY WHEN THE C.O. TELLS HIM MY IMPORTANT MESSAGE IS AN ACCOUNT OF WHAT THE COMPANY OWES TO HIM, AND A REQUEST FOR RECOGNITION OF HIS CONDUCT.

JUST BEFORE DAWN, B.S. BILL WAS DISCOVERED BY A GROUP OF MEN PROWLING OVER THE FORWARD SLOPE OF THE RIDGE.
ACHTUNG, KAMERADEN! AN ENGLANDER!
THE WAR'S OVER FOR ME. SO IS ALL CHANCE OF EARNING PROMOTION OR ANOTHER GONG. NOW IT'S A PRETTY BLUE OUTLOOK, BILL SUTTON.
...

NAZI GERMANY'S COLLAPSE WAS STILL SEVERAL MONTHS DISTANT WHEN A FAMILIAR FACE SHOWED UP AT A P.O.W. CAMP WHERE BILL SUTTON WAS A PRISONER...
JENNER! SO YOU'VE LANDED IN THE BAG, AS WELL! HOW WAS 'B' COMPANY WHEN YOU LAST SAW IT? WHAT ABOUT CURTIS? DID HE GET BACK TO OUR LINES THAT NIGHT?
YES, CURTIS GOT BACK ALL RIGHT, MAJOR. DID HE CARRY ON WHEN HE HEARD WHAT YOUR MESSAGE AMOUNTED TO! 'I WASN'T AFTER NO PERISHIN' GONG,' HE KEPT SAYING.
BUT THE HIGH-UPS DID GIVE HIM A GONG — THE D.C.M — THE MILITARY MEDAL, MAYBE..?

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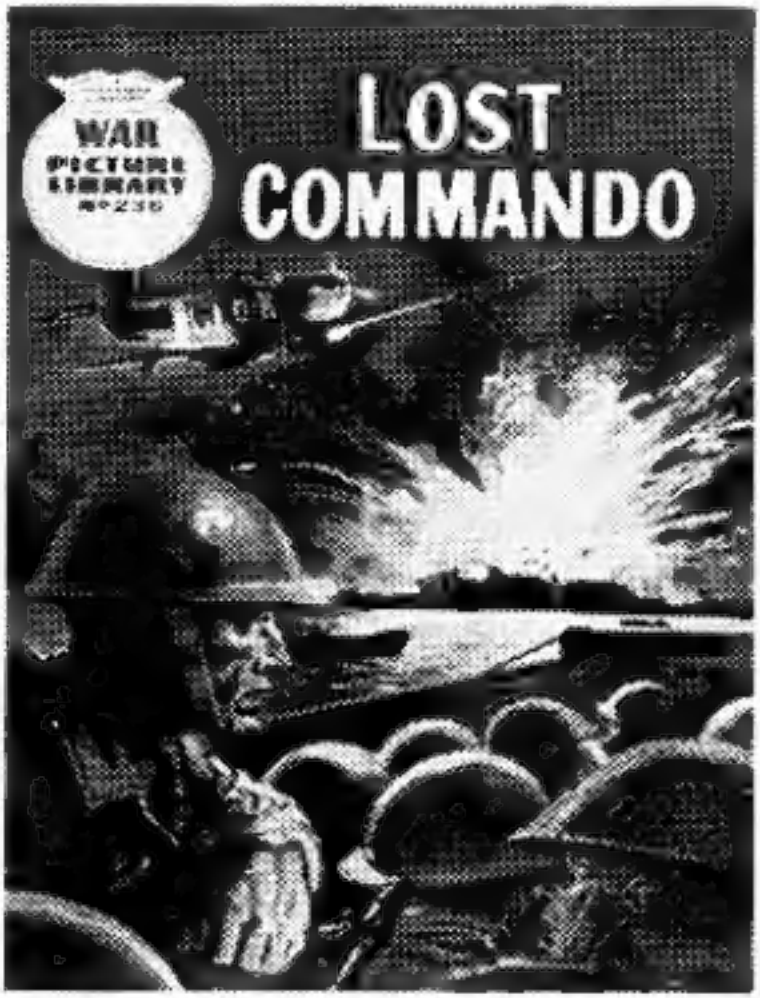

Their tough leader vanished in the thick of battle. Was it fear or treachery, capture or sudden death?

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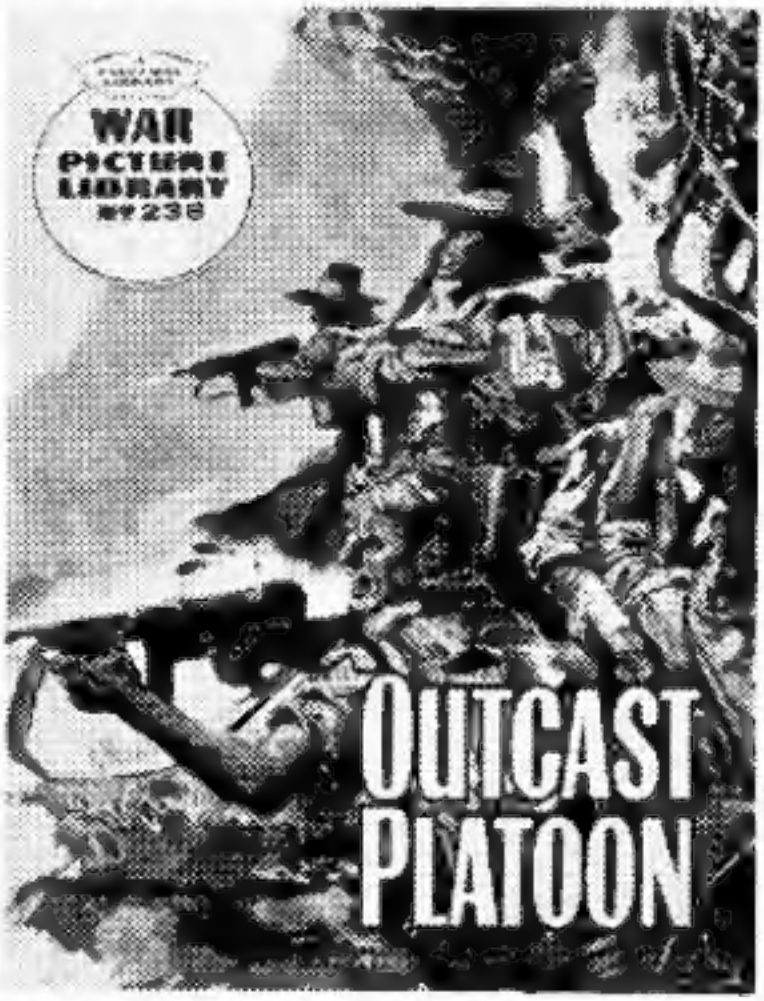

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